

# **Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Investment Strategies Committee**

## **Final Meeting Summary June 9, 1999**

*Approved July 14, 1999*

**Present:** Dale Stedman, Chair, Bill Lampson, Vice Chair, R. Ted Bottiger, Don Briscoe, Senator Mary Margaret Haugen, Peter Hurley, Jennifer Joly, Patricia Otley, Charles Mott

**Absent:** Bettie Ingham, Arthur D. Jackson, Jr., John Kelly, Representative Maryann Mitchell

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The Chair called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. He reviewed the minutes from the May 12<sup>th</sup> meeting and asked for any proposed revisions. The Committee approved the minutes from the previous meeting as presented.

### **Overview of Land Use and Transportation Connection**

Daniel Malarkey, Committee staff, presented a brief overview of the current issues related to land use and transportation. He discussed how design and density of suburban areas impedes the use of non-automotive modes. He also noted some areas experiencing new growth lack adequate transportation infrastructure and that some transportation investments are inconsistent with land-use plans. Some potential solutions include: 1) adopting policies to encourage urban and suburban design that is more friendly to pedestrians and transit users; 2) strengthening the link between transportation funding and areas accepting new growth at higher densities, and 3) strengthening regional agencies' ability to make transportation investments consistent with land-use plans. Key issues that should inform any policy changes in this area include trends in residential preferences, the effect of higher-density living on road congestion, and the implications of better land use and transportation integration for investment priorities.

### **Pedestrian-Oriented Design: The Market, Opportunities, and Constraints**

Tom Philips, Principal of Community Planning and Research, reviewed national and local trends on homeowner preferences. He reported that the demographics of homeowners have changed: 54% of households are childless; married couples without children are the fastest growing market segment; and homeownership by single people is up 13% this decade. Philips' research found that in suburban areas, many homeowners prefer elements of the "New Urbanist" design. These design elements include large porches; garages that are secure, but not the focus of the design of the house; a private back yard; neighborhood squares; proximity to old-fashioned main streets; brick walks; and buried utility lines. To many homeowners, however, price and space remain more important than these design elements. As long as it is an affordable option, some

people will prefer to live on ¼-acre lots. That type of lower-density living generates 10-15 trips auto each day, which contributes to a higher number of vehicle miles traveled.

In Washington state, there is evidence that more compact development can succeed financially. Belltown Court, new downtown condominiums, Highlands, and Madison Cottages have had strong market acceptance. According to Philips, master-planned communities with elements of new urbanism command an 11% price premium over comparable low-density development. The design of these higher-density projects reduces the obstacles to walking and thus the number of automobile trips generated each day.

According to Philips, thoughtful transportation planning can increase the percentage of non-auto trips. Planning roads with more outlets, building alleys, and creating mixed-use buildings can reduce the number of daily auto trips per household by up to 30%. Streets with amenities, such as trees, sidewalks, medians, can help attract the desired land use because the infrastructure is already in place. While some communities resist higher-density development, good zoning and design guidelines can win public support for these types of development.

Philips stated that the financial community and homebuyers are no longer obstacles to higher-density development in the Puget Sound area. Recent experience has shown banks will finance the projects, and people will buy them.

### **Linking Land Use and Transportation in Portland's MAX Corridor**

G. B. Arrington, Director of Strategic Planning at Tri-Met, discussed Portland's aggressive strategy to link transportation and land use as part of a regional strategy to create a livable community. Portland's considerable investment in light rail (\$3.4 billion) encouraged transit-oriented development around the stations, currently totaling \$2.4 billion. This development was possible because of the presence of available sites, zoning for higher-density transit-oriented development, a strong development market, and a tight urban growth boundary.

In conjunction with the investment in transit, the city has limited parking in the downtown area. The City allows the highest building densities and limits parking spots near transit corridors to promote transit ridership. Portland has also encouraged the high-density development in existing neighborhoods that is in keeping with the scale and character of those neighborhoods.

Drawing conclusions for Seattle from Portland's experience, Arrington stated:

1. Portland's experience is a powerful example that land use does matter if you take the long-term view. Married with transportation, land use can shape what the transportation needs are and create workable alternatives to how cities traditionally grow.
2. Land use has a profound impact on the scale and cost of the system needed to build. By investing in transit and encouraging pedestrian-oriented development, Portland avoided building new roads he estimated would have cost \$6.4 billion.
3. Land use and transportation are not in balance across most of America. It is impossible to spend enough to chase sprawl and solve congestion. Transportation officials have two powerful tools to shape how communities grow and thereby reduce transportation costs.

- a. Federal transportation funding can pay for efforts to integrate transportation and land plans. The state and regional MPO can pass through funds to local governments.
  - b. Local land use codes can encourage transit and pedestrian-oriented development.
- 4. Congestion is not necessarily a problem. It is often an indication of economic vitality. Widening a road because of congestion can destroy the town and land uses that a community wants to promote. At the Metro and state level, Oregon has adopted variable congestion standards. In places planned for density with transit options, jurisdictions in Portland are willing to accept relatively high levels of congestion.
- 5. Streets and roads should respect the places they pass through. An interconnected grid of small streets can perform better than a system of big roads. And it is cheaper. The result is a system that works better, and it responds to the reality that the vast majority of trips are short trips.

Arrington distributed a Tri-Met publication entitled *At Work in the Field of Dreams: Light Rail and Smart Growth in Portland*. This work gives more detail to the presentation and is available for downloading at <http://www.tri-met.org/reports/dreams98.htm>.

### **Integrating Land Use and Transportation: Successes and Challenges of Planning under the Growth Management Act**

Mary McCumber, Director of the Puget Sound Regional Council, reviewed Washington's experience with Growth Management and gave some suggestions on how to make it work better. The booming economy of the 1980s and 1990s created an environment where developed land grew at a faster rate than population. Almost 70% of the growth in the Puget Sound during the 1980s occurred in unincorporated areas without adequate facilities. This sprawling pattern of land use made it difficult and expensive to provide transit service in the outlying areas. During the same period, vehicle miles traveled grew four times faster than population. Regional planning requirements to deal with these issues were not in place until the early 1990s.

The state Growth Management Act (GMA) established state goals and gave local government the ability to work toward those goals to create a land use and transportation system that recognized local needs. At the same time, federal transportation legislation set priorities for states that helped to integrate transportation with land use. The Puget Sound region adopted *Vision 2020*, which integrated land use and transportation planning at the local level for the first time. These plans, as eventually adopted by counties, addressed where to concentrate new development, how modes should link, and how to improve the efficiency of the transportation system.

McCumber observed that the Puget Sound region has come along way in its land use planning, and is second only to Portland in getting a handle on growth boundaries. The Urban Growth Boundary in the Puget Sound contains 16% of the land and 84% of the people. The GMA designates major centers within Urban Growth Boundaries, which has encouraged infill development.

McCumber thinks that communities must take many small steps to encourage more positive land use patterns. First, Regional Transportation Plans need to be more specific and the transportation funding needs to follow the land-use priorities. Second, federal money can help to meet the goals of the regional plans by funding a combination of land-use and transportation solutions. Finally, cities, counties, and regional authorities need education and advocacy on the best practices for land use planning. It is a hard process, and local agencies have the least experience.

### **Public Comment Period**

Jo Simmons, from Citizens Against Tolls, expressed concerns about the use of public-private partnerships to fund transportation projects, emphasizing the importance of understanding and listening to the communities that are affected by such policies. Don Williams, a Gig Harbor resident, distributed a memo with information about the authority of the state to collect tolls. Committee members asked the staff to research further the constraints on debt capacity for state-owned facilities.

### **Review of Committee Work to Date & Discussion of Potential Findings and Recommendations**

Daniel Malarkey gave a brief overview of the topics already covered by the Committee. He reviewed the work plan and reminded Committee members of the goal of reaching agreement on findings by the September retreat. He then asked Committee members what types of statements should go into the *Findings* document for the Committee. He also asked them to identify any issues of fact that need resolution prior to reaching agreements on *Findings*. This discussion is the beginning of process that will continue in July, August, and September. The Committee had a brainstorming session that generated a preliminary list of potential statements that included:

- **Solutions to transportation problems need to be multi-faceted.** Not just another lane or bus route, but a number of items that go together to create a solution. Need to do a better job of linking land use and transportation planning, especially at a local level where resources are not currently available.
- **Decisionmaking is too diffuse in Washington.** With almost 500 agencies, it is difficult to accomplish significant projects. Though each agency should give input, fewer agencies at the regional or state level should make the decisions.
- **Congestion is diminishing our quality of life.** If congestion is not relieved, the quality of life and economic vitality of Washington state will get worse. Quality of life should be a goal of the Committee's recommendations.
- **\$104 billion in needs is not realistic.** The state does not have the resources to support this kind of development. Too many codes and specifications for building roads exist that make it costly and inefficient to build. We need a way to identify what is a realistic goal for projects. Taxing ourselves for the uncovered needs would harm our quality of life and economic vitality.
- **Need closer link between transportation funding and results.** The public is frustrated because they do not feel like they are getting the results they are paying for. Projects need a corridor approach, rather than a fragmented or localized approach that currently occurs.

- **Jurisdictions need reasonable and manageable fiscal parameters.** Rather than a project-by-project funding mechanism, funding should be distributed in a new way that encourages better investment and modal strategies for congestion relief. When making investments now, agencies are not taking on a comprehensive view of the road network, and thus results are fragmented and do not inform each other (especially in the case of land use and transportation).
- **Modal decisions are not integrated.** There is not a sufficiently comprehensive view of transportation investments. The “Highway view” and the “Transit view” do not inform each other as much as they could; the result is modal fragmentation.
- **The current transportation system does not fund most efficient policies first.** There are often more efficient ways to provide mobility enhancements, including trip reduction programs. We should look to different strategies to approach and fund congestion mitigation.
- **Federal ISTEA legislation helped reduce the barriers between the funding categories at the federal level.** Helga Morgenstern from WSDOT testified at an earlier Commission meeting to the 44 categories for transportation funding that exist in Washington. ISTEA simplifies federal categories into only four (maintenance, surface transportation, mobility, and air quality) that could be adopted in this state. Can use this as a model for Washington transportation decisionmaking.
- **Transportation planning is a highly politicized process.** The “needs” list is currently a wish list from transportation agencies. The legislature drives transportation investments rather than analysis about cost-effectiveness.
- **Do not have consistent methods for analyzing needs.** Consequently, we lack a good sense of the magnitude of needs.
- **Congestion may be a subjective problem.** G. B. Arrington mentioned that congestion might be a good thing, in that it indicates economic vitality. Mobility may be as important or more important than congestion.
- **The Committee should seriously consider pricing, at least for adding new general-purpose capacity.** The Committee is not sure if this state is ready for congestion pricing, but it should stay on the table. Tolls create a link between dollars and benefits that is more visible to people.

Staff will use this list and the issue papers as a foundation to develop a draft *Findings* statement before the July meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.